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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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ANNOUNCE CHANGES IN ALASKA COMMERCIAL FISHING REGULATIONS

Several significant amendments to the 1955 regulations for the proper utilization and conservation of the commercial fisheries of Alaska were announced today by Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay.

Most important is the one which separates trap sites from areas open to set nets in the Cook Inlet area. In this amendment, the location of every trap in Cook Inlet is pinpointed and the use of any other gear at such sites is prohibited. Exception is made in the northern and north-central districts for the use of king salmon set nets prior to June 25 when traps cannot be used. Traps also are prohibited in areas open to set nets.

The changes in the regulations to describe sites open to traps and areas open to set nets in Cook Inlet were recommended jointly by fishermen, trap operators, and cannery operators, and were unanimously approved by local residents at a series of hearings conducted by the Fish and Wildlife Service at Homer, Kenai, and Anchorage in January. These changes, according to Secretary McKay, will prevent the encroachment of either form of gear on the other, and will go far to promote harmony in the salmon fishery of that area. Secretary McKay also emphasized that fishing effort in the area will not be altered by these changes.

With the passage of Public Law 12, 84th Congress, which was approved by the President on March 16, all three types of fishing gear used in Cook Inlet will be left as they were in 1954. The minimum distance between sets in Cook Inlet will remain at 600 feet, the minimum distance between traps at 2,500 feet, and the maximum length of drift nets at 150 fathoms.

A Federal Court decision in Alaska last summer held that set nets are fixed gear. The Fish and Wildlife Service historically has considered them as movable gear. One effect of the court decision was to subject set nets to a statutory requirement which specifies that units of fixed gear must not be less than 1,800 feet apart, laterally. Set nets in the past have been operated from 300 to 600 feet apart.

When the Fish and Wildlife Service reported that an 1,800 foot-minimum interval between set nets is not considered essential to conservation requirements, and that imposition of the drastic limitation would impose hardships on small fishermen, the Department ordered action on new set net regulations suspended pending action by Congress. Since the new legislation, which the Department supported, was enacted prior to the 1955 fishing season, no immediate change in the set net regulation is necessary with respect to the distance interval between set nets. Public

Law 12, in effect, exempts set, anchored, and staked gill nets from the 1,800-foot minimum distance interval required for all other fixed gear.

One of the amendments will allow beach seines to fish in Chinikna Bay in Cook Inlet. This was proposed by the Fish and Wildlife Service at the hearings last fall but was not included in the revised regulations announced in January. This is a chum salmon area and this species can be harvested there successfully only by beach seines.

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